

TCEQ readies response efforts for Hurricane Laura

AUSTIN—As Hurricane Laura approaches the Texas coast, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality prepares to deploy its air monitoring vans and mobile command post to respond to the hurricane's impact.

During emergency situations, TCEQ provides strategic state assets to support state and local operations and assists its regulated facilities to continue to provide essential services to the public. In preparation for Hurricane Laura, TCEQ stands ready to enact emergency response plans for air quality monitoring, safe drinking water, critical water infrastructure, wastewater and sewage; and flood water.

TCEQ's Mobile Command Post and Emergency Management Support Team will deploy Friday at 8 a.m. to provide support to the storm affected areas in Southeast Texas. TCEQ will also deploy a Disaster Response Strike Team from the Western Regions to assist with these response efforts.

Air Quality Monitoring

When it is safe to do so, TCEQ will deploy two mobile monitoring vans, equipped with rapid assessment survey technology that reports air quality data in real-time, as well as various types of handheld air monitoring equipment. TCEQ has also requested EPA's ASPECT aircraft and TAGA mobile laboratory.

The agency's stationary air monitors in Beaumont and Houston, which are not designed to withstand hurricane-force winds, are secured and will be redeployed when the threat has passed. It is TCEQ's policy to protect its assets against loss or damage by securing them or moving them away from the storm's potential path to protect Texas' significant financial investment and ensure that they are available to support response efforts in areas impacted by the hurricane once the threat has diminished.

TCEQ's [Air Monitoring webpage](#) has [a running list of stations](#) that are offline and will be updated to indicate when they are returned to operation.

TCEQ's Emergency Management staff will be aided by the Texas National Guard's Texas 6th Civil Support Team for handheld monitoring and command control support.

Air monitoring will assess impacts to human health and the environment from hazardous material spills and releases or ensure that such activities are being properly conducted by the responsible party. If a threat posed by air quality requires a public response, such as sheltering in place, those orders will be issued by local government leaders or the local emergency response authority (i.e. fire department, office of emergency management).

Drinking Water

To ensure safe drinking water before, during and after the hurricane, TCEQ's Office of Water has contacted public water system operators to provide hurricane preparedness guidance, instructions on issuing a boil water notice and resources for assistance. Following the event, staff will make assessment calls to get operational statuses of public water systems. If necessary, TCEQ will deploy staff to assist operators in restoring the system to normal operating conditions as quickly and safely as possible.

Critical Water Infrastructure

TCEQ's Critical Infrastructure Division is monitoring the projected path of the hurricane and is ready to assist dam owners with damage or failures. After the storm passes, TCEQ will contact dam owners to assess any issues that could result in downstream damage or loss of life.

Wastewater and Sewage

TCEQ will contact wastewater treatment plants to provide technical guidance and support in response to damage and flooding. The agency will actively monitor any facilities who report spills as a result of Hurricane Laura and continue to reach out to facilities in flood-impacted areas. Should the need arise, TCEQ will coordinate with other state resources to deploy assistance teams to work directly with system operators to expedite getting systems back to operational status.

Floodwater

Floodwaters contain many hazards, including bacteria and other contaminants. Precautions should be taken by anyone involved in cleanup activities or any others who may be exposed to flood waters. These precautions include heeding all warnings from local and state authorities regarding safety advisories. In addition to the drowning hazards of wading, swimming, or driving in swift floodwaters, these waters can carry large objects that are not always readily visible that can cause injuries to those in the water. Other potential hazards

include downed power lines and possible injuries inflicted by animals displaced by the floodwaters.

Superfund Sites

The TCEQ has ensured that state Superfund sites in the projected path of Hurricane Laura are secured. Sites in the affected area will be assessed once re-entry is possible. TCEQ is also coordinating with the US EPA on federal Superfund sites.

General Information

In preparation of Hurricane Laura, TCEQ backed up computer servers and rerouted phone lines from regional offices in the anticipated affected areas to ensure uninterrupted agency support.

For additional safety in responding to an emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas Military Forces will staff medics and a nurse practitioner from the Texas State Guard to provide medical support to field personnel.

Parties working independently of TCEQ and its partners may also monitor air quality and publish their data or findings. However, historically, [this data has been plagued by significant data](#) quality issues and may therefore be unreliable. Additionally, we have noted problems with the manner in which this data has been interpreted and presented to the public. Accordingly, these presentations could misstate the actual risk.

TCEQ asks that anyone who has a specific concern about an emission source or potentially unhealthy air quality in the aftermath of Hurricane Laura to please contact TCEQ at 1-888-777-3186 or complaint@tceq.texas.gov or you can fill out a form [here](#).

For the most up-to-date information on TCEQ's response to Hurricane Laura, visit our [Hurricane Laura Response webpage](#) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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